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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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PARTICIPANTS: The Secretary
Ambassador Dobrynin
Assistant Secretary Leddy

DATE: September 20, 1968

PLACE: Department of State

TIME: 12:30 p.m.

Copies to:

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
NLJ 95-310
By CB, NARA Date 2-14-97

This meeting took place at the request of Ambassador Dobrynin who asked to see the Secretary on the question of US/Soviet discussions on peaceful explosive nuclear devices (PNEDS). (There is a separate memorandum of conversation on this subject and on the question raised by the Secretary of the Soviet propaganda campaign against Germany and Berlin.) What follows is a note, in one copy, of off-the-record remarks made by the Secretary, and Dobrynin's responses.

The Secretary said that when he came into office he had been convinced that the Soviets were sincere when they said that they wanted to pursue a policy of "peaceful co-existence". He had continued to hold this view during the past few years. There had apparently been a real desire on the part of the Soviet Union to see a broadening of contacts between East and West, a lessening of tensions, a degree of liberalization, a disposition to come to grips with some of the real problems in the world. However, the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia had raised questions in his mind. He didn't understand why the Soviets had felt it necessary to do what they did in Czechoslovakia. Were there new elements or forces at work in the Soviet system? Was there a different orientation of Soviet foreign policy in the making? What might this mean in terms of a policy of peaceful co-existence?

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It was at this point, reported in the other memorandum, that Dobrynin asserted, not on a purely personal basis but with official force, that the Soviet Union continued to pursue the policy of peaceful co-existence. He added that he had gained the impression that a number of American officials somehow thought that the Soviets were now deliberately attempting to intensify contacts with the United States and other western countries because of Czechoslovakia (i.e., presumably to help the Soviets in shoving Czechoslovakia under the rug). He denied that this was the case and said that these efforts at contact were simply the continued pursuit of peaceful co-existence, as before.

The Secretary then referred to the fact that the invitation for a meeting between the President and Soviet leaders in the Soviet Union and the Czech invasion had occurred about the same time; that he had concluded that the Soviet decisions on both matters must have been made by the same people at about the same time, presumably over the weekend; and that the coincidence of the actions was like throwing a dead fish in the face of the President of the United States.

Dobrynin said that he could not give an official explanation of this coincidence, but being familiar with the Soviet bureaucracy, he had personally concluded that the decision to invite President Johnson to the Soviet Union (communicated to Secretary Rusk aboard the HONEY FITZ on the evening of August 19) had been made in Moscow about a week before. He said that a decision of this kind, although having been made, nevertheless had to go through a bureaucratic process of several days. On the other hand, it was clear that the decision to invade Czechoslovakia had been made considerably later, perhaps on the weekend of the 17th-18th or even Monday, the 19th. He pointed to the fact that several of the Soviet leaders had been on vacation and were called back to Moscow over this weekend.

EUR:JLeddy

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